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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 2038  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 4012  
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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1332  
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4439  
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RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3727  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 6070  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000729

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [ELTN](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [IR](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: AFGHAN AMBASSADOR OPEN TO INCREASED INDIAN  
COOPERATION

Classified By: Ambassador David C. Mulford for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

**¶1. (C) SUMMARY:** Afghan Ambassador to India, Dr. Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, told Ambassador Mulford February 12 that India and Afghanistan had a strong relationship, and that Indian help in strengthening Afghanistan's infrastructure was welcome. He said that Pakistan is overly sensitive about India's interests in Afghanistan, suggesting that Afghanistan needs peace and cooperation with all of its neighbors. He observed that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which Afghanistan has just joined, could help encourage the creation of a land route from Afghanistan to India, but lamented that Pakistan "is not ready for that." Afghanistan had tried to maintain a friendship with Iran, he said, warning that "we have to be careful at the moment" with that relationship. END SUMMARY.

Afghanistan Needs Cooperation With Its Neighbors

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**¶2. (C) Afghan Ambassador to India, Dr. Sayed Makhdoom Raheen, told Ambassador Mulford February 12 that India and Afghanistan had enjoyed a strong relationship for two thousand years, and that Afghanistan never in its history had a problem with India. He stated that the American military presence in Afghanistan was good for all, indicating that the U.S. presence encouraged cooperation. When pressed for specific ideas on how India and the U.S. could cooperate more in Afghanistan, Raheen noted that India could be particularly**

helpful in reconstructing Afghanistan's infrastructure, most notably in the areas of road building, electricity, power and information technology. Asked what limitations India faced on helping Afghanistan, Raheen remarked that "Pakistan is usually too sensitive." He said that Pakistan misinterprets the role of India's four consulates in Afghanistan, attributing to them various nefarious activities. He articulated that Afghanistan needs peace and cooperation with all of its neighbors, and observed that there were signs of improvement in India's relationship with Pakistan. "Before, there was no optimism," he said, "but now, there are negotiations."

"Even small projects can change things"

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¶3. (C) Raheen was positive on the prospect of Indian assistance to the Afghan bureaucracy, remarking that such training could take place in both India and Afghanistan, and noting that officials could be trained in both India and Kabul. "It is very important for the Afghan people to see the fruit of reconstruction," underscored Raheen, asserting that projects did not necessarily have to be large to have an impact. "Even small projects can change things," he averred, suggesting that India could send enough qualified people to help reconstruct Afghanistan's traditional irrigation system, which had been mostly destroyed. Asked what was constraining India from taking an active role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, Raheen theorized that Pakistan had made Indian assistance to Afghanistan a sensitive issue. "Pakistan

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doesn't have the right to worry about this kind of involvement - training and helping people," Raheen claimed.

Pakistan an Obstacle to A Land Route to India?

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¶4. (C) Turning to the prospect of constructing a land route from Afghanistan to India, Raheen noted that "Afghanistan historically has connected central to south Asia," adding that it had been known as a center for cultural exchanges and business transactions. Raheen argued that it would be up to SAARC to smooth the way for a transit route, but opined that "Pakistan is not ready for that," citing Pakistani spokeswoman Tasneen Aslam as having stated that public opinion was not ready for a land route to India. He said that he did not believe the spokeswoman's claim, noting that he had worked in Pakistan before and that Pakistanis had been very helpful to their Afghan neighbors in times of difficulty. "This (land route issue) is a big obstacle for us," he lamented. Raheen acknowledged that the Taliban was encouraged and protected in Pakistan today more than it had been in the past, noting this was dangerous to Pakistan to itself as well as to the entire region. "I don't know why they are doing it," he wondered, adding that perhaps there were strong extremist elements in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency. Raheen was hopeful that moderate elements in Pakistan could reemerge, and underlined that he thought Pakistan could survive without President Musharraf. Pakistan would move "slowly, slowly toward a democracy," in the absence of Musharraf, predicted Raheen.

Maintaining a Friendship with Iran

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¶5. (C) Raheen maintained that Afghanistan needed to "be careful about Iran for the moment," expressing concern that, when American troops leave Afghanistan, "our neighbors will get as greedy as they were when the Soviets left." For now, Afghanistan would carefully maintain its "friendship with Iran," according to Raheen.

Comment

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¶6. (C) One Afghan diplomat told us that the April SAARC summit could not be seen as a success for Afghanistan if progress cannot be made toward opening a land route between India and Afghanistan as required under the SAARC treaty. Ambassador Raheen seems to have lowered expectations, however, acknowledging that Pakistan is not yet ready to move on transit rights even for humanitarian goods. END COMMENT.

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